Chapter 16

Afterword:

Urging the post-intercultural disruption forward

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I was attending a professional development workshop for language teachers in 1994, in my (then) new role of teaching Indonesian language and culture to Kindergarten classes, and heard of Claire Kramsch (1993) and the notion of a 'third place' in language and culture learning (Kramsch, 1993, p. 236). If her work discussed a 'third' place, I wondered about the 'first' and 'second' place too. I came to understand that these 5-year-old Australian students would not be learning Indonesian in the 'first place' as Indonesian was not their mother tongue. Nor could I teach these children in the 'second place' where I could produce native-like second language speakers. Instead I was to consider this Indonesian language teaching and learning in the 'third place' – somewhere between first and second place – 'in the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with, and the new cultures he or she is being introduced to' (Kramsch, 1993, p. 236). The 'third place' is where the learner would make sense of a newly developing personal and linguistic identity as they learned to manoeuvre their thinking in new ways using a new (Indonesian) code.

I prepared for my first lesson with Kindergarten: in a schooling context way prior to the existence of 'connected classrooms' (Barker & Whiting, 2008). There was no multi-media, no 'connected' screens allowing the sounds and colours of Indonesian lives to appear. Instead I had a brand new set of colourful authentic images of Indonesia and Indonesians on poster chart-cards to share with my class. I considered that as their teacher with first-hand experience of Indonesia, I would be delivering an Indonesian experience to the children of this rural Australian wheat and sheep farming community.

I metaphorically 'set sail', I left the jetty behind and was regaling the class about the differences between Australia and Indonesia when suddenly a boy raised his hand as if to ask a question about the matter I was discussing. He told me that the previous evening he had lost his front tooth!

All the children gasped. The boy opened his mouth wide to show off the gap in his smile. The wind was metaphorically taken out of my sails – we had been steering so well until this electrical storm blew my ship off course.

I had to bring the class back to my stories. I heard myself responding that Indonesian children lose their teeth too. Luckily – amazingly on queue – the next card I turned over revealed the toothless grin of an Indonesian 5-year-old boy. Better timing was there never! This primary school language teacher had sailed back into calmer waters with the turn of a page.

I recall reflecting after this critical incident that I had focused the children back on the theme of my lesson. I had extended out from difference and brought them back with 'similarity'. I consider this one of my 'knowing-what-to-do-when-you-don't-know-what-to-do' teaching moments (Van Manen, 2015), and believe it significantly impacted what I then continued to do and know in my work in teacher education. It became obvious to me that for these Kindergarten children, 'same' made sense.

Dervin, Moloney and Simpson's volume almost 25 years later traces still, how, among other things, educators are best to teach similarity alongside difference within an intercultural orientation underpinned by the development of learners' intercultural competences. Yet in many senses, teaching languages and cultures – teaching in generally really – with an intercultural orientation is way more than simply presenting 'similarity versus difference'.

The chapters in this volume offer comment on critiques of an intercultural orientation, on the importance of reflexivity in intercultural activities, the first (to my knowledge) discussion of indigeneity and intercultural approaches, democracy and culture, as well as critical intercultural explorations.

A number of notions can be held up as sobering bases upon which to think broadly and deeply about scoping an intercultural orientation to teaching and learning, and to underpin teacher education for the work the next generations can undertake.

First, teaching students to be interculturally competent needs to be free of essentialism. It is true that as humans we essentialise and stereotype, because not to do so would mean that possibilities and variations are endless. We seek to reduce data simply to be able to comprehend it. Suggestions in this volume are for reflexivity to be in place, especially in teacher preparation: strategies for learners to acknowledge this essentialism.

Second, there is the notion of the importance of always remembering the instability of negotiating the 'third place'. People will be people, and none of us are exactly the same – thus multiple identities are negotiated in interactions with others. Saltmarsh (this volume) emphasises how it is 'more instructive and valuable to explore shared or common experiences as a means of understanding one another'.

Third is almost a call to action – in a disruptive sort of way. That is, to remember to go beyond assumptions to achieve intercultural learning. For teacher education, an investigative pedagogy can effect this. This links with the fourth set of considerations: that although it is human nature to steer towards similarity and difference as vantage points for communicating and understanding, it is the examination of the continuum between similarity and difference where deep learning can occur.

A fifth notion is that the 'discourse' aspect of language should never be forgotten. That humans use language for many purposes, and discourses within languages occur due to culture and context, is a basic tenet guiding the writing of, for example, Moloney, Lobotsyna and Moate's chapter (this volume).

Yet there is still an urgency imposing a shadow on what teachers can achieve. The urgency threaded through this volume concerns the preparation of interculturally competent teachers. More than ten years ago Harbon and Browett (2006) had asked who is keeping teacher educators engaged with notions of interculturality.

Happily this volume provides hope, I believe, and we can therefore presume much scholarly effort has been made in those ten years since 2006. In response to the claim that teacher educators are limited in acknowledging their own intercultural competence development, the chapters in this volume provide models of how collaboration can occur to ensure intercultural competence development. For at least one group of authors, the writing of the chapter had afforded collaboration. Other chapters talk explicitly about a methodology to undertake an interculturally informed introspection of their work (Buchanan and Hellstén).

The authors have risen to the challenge of 'collectivising and sharing responsibility for developing intercultural competencies' (Posti-Ahokas, Janhonen-Abruquauah and Adu-Yeboah, last page), leaving behind and steering away from 'shallow' models adhering to ethical principles (Itkonen). For the authors who discuss how best teacher education, and school education address and cater for

'cultural plurality' (Major, Munday and Winslade; Paatela-Niemenen critical intertextual competence chapter), there are potential solutions. In the work of Chen and Helot (2018) who deconstruct plurilingual and pluricultural competence or (PPC) we gain further understandings of the pedagogical outcomes of the notion of PPC: assisting teachers to understand 'the cognitive benefits of acknowledging their students' previous language competence in all its diversity and to recognise the value of adopting a more ecological approach to language teaching' (Chen & Helot, 2018, p. 169). Simpson's tracking of a methodology which allowed a discussion of how democracy should not be understood as intercultural competence, indicates there is still work to do.

Wanted: much more disruption – and even discomfort

This volume has allowed authors to experiment with new and adapted methodologies. The editors quite rightly point out that the field has been polysemic to this point in time, and western-centric too. It is heartening to read in this volume about the cross-national writing (Moloney and Turunen) resulting from rich collaboration and (no doubt) passionate dialogue between these scholars. These scholars have 'met' in a 'third place' (Kramsch, 1993) themselves, using English. There are riches in this phenomenon alone. Terms now appear to describe the 'affect' resulting from intercultural disruption. Both 'dilemmas' (Itkonen) and 'challenges' (Paatela-Niemenan) are evident is a given in an intercultural orientation. There is empathy but also vulnerability, there is racism and frustration (Page et al.). Such strong terms show the impassioned way that notions of interculturality have entered intercultural work.

This book metaphorically peels away the layers involved in preparing teachers with an intercultural orientation. The outer layer signifies education in general. Inside the outer layer is a second layer signifying teacher education. Inside that again is yet another layer: a layer developing intercultural competence in teachers. Peeling away and exposing the layers will indicate, through a discourse of 'fragility' (Dervin, 2016, p. 65), that considered and careful care must be taken as all the key players engage with real people who will make a difference to the next generations. The authors of the chapters in this volume sometimes do this singlehanded (Goldstein). Sometimes a number of authors explore intercultural concepts 'side-by-side' (Moloney, Lobotsyna and Moate), building understandings together. Working side by side can lead to shared understanding. If nothing more, these chapters are models of indicating how the exploration of the intercultural should not be an isolated struggle.

Recently Kramsch (2018) has forged ahead in her thinking about culture in education and notes how a changed world has created new contexts for learning. She notes that culture has become 'something that individuals carry in their heads as they leave home, migrate to another country, settle down in a third and raise children who will spend much of their days online and on the internet' (Kramsch, 2018, p. 16). The authors in this volume have trialled strategies to address these 'new times' (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). These new times will continue to challenge and disrupt.

Over time, intercultural education will need more time to disrupt, and scholars need more time to track and research the disruption. These stories cannot be quantified – these tenuous concepts are ethereal in the way they are concrete yet not quantifiable. Words – not numbers – embody the notions. Words here are strong, but are not hard and fast, or emotive.

The editors claim in their introductory chapter that the concept of intercultural competence has been polysemic, and that idea is realised nowhere better than in this volume. Disruption has been their intention, and disrupt they have. Scholars quite happy in their current understanding of 'the intercultural' could be excused for emerging from reading this volume and leaving the last page more confused than when they began – needing 'lesser reliance on hopeful or naïve intuition' (Goldstein, last page).

Children like my Kindergartners mentioned earlier, are the first to impatiently ask are we there yet. They bemoaning the length of their journeys, literally and metaphorically. On the educational journey at present, especially for developments in teacher education, the question may well be about a post-intercultural orientation. I believe the authors in this volume, if asked 'are we there yet?', would say no.

Which leaves one final note regarding what Niemi and Hahl stated about 'pedagogies of discomfort'. The possibility here is that this whole volume pushes the disruption forward, and furthers Dervin's (2016, p. 83) discomfort into an even deeper discourse of discomfort. Those of us gazing into crystal balls will attest to this being a fertile context for the next developments in accomplished teacher education.

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